

USDA NRCS AND THE ORIS SIGN AGREEMENT TO HELP FUND A DEMONSTRATION SITE TO EDUCATE REFUGEE FARMERS ABOUT NRCS PROGRAMS



Mukhtar Idhow, Executive Director ORIS and Rick Ellsmore, NRCS State Conservationist shake hands after signing agreement to help refugee farmers in New Hampshire.



Holding ribbon left to right: Mukhtar Idhow, Rick Ellsmore, Lee Green, NRCS District Conservationist, Anthony Munene, Farm Manager, New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). In the background, fourth from left: Andrea Bye, Agricultural Training Coordinator and numerous refugee farmers.

May 4, 2012, Dunbarton, NH

Refugee farmers gathered with representatives from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Farmers (ORIS), and the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP) to celebrate their new high tunnel and the agreement between NRCS and ORIS to help educate refugee farmers about NRCS technical and financial assistance programs at the ORIS farm site in Dunbarton, NH. This unique collaboration between federal and local groups combines to help refugee farmers create sustainable farming operations. Rick Ellsmore, State Conservationist of the NRCS said “the NRCS is proud to help the newest members of the New Hampshire farming community. It’s partnerships like this one that help us get Federal assistance to people who need it most”.

Lee Green, NRCS District Conservationist began the relationship with the refugee farmers and was the first member of their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group which is now 25 members strong and growing. People become members of CSAs by making an advanced purchase of a portion of the crop yield. Lee’s CSA purchase was his own and was not funded by the NRCS. Andrea Bye, Agricultural Project Manager for NASAP said, “If it wasn’t for Lee, we wouldn’t be under this roof today”.

USDA NRCS AND THE ORIS SIGN AGREEMENT TO HELP FUND A DEMONSTRATION SITE TO EDUCATE REFUGEE FARMERS ABOUT NRCS PROGRAMS (CONT.)



The farmers provided a pot-luck of culinary delights from Somalia and Bhutan



The seven-acre farm in Dunbarton, NH, leased by the ORIS, provides 1/4 to one-acre plots for refugee farmers.

ORIS has helped over 150 refugee farmers in NH, most from Somalia with farmer training programs and agricultural land to farm. Last year, there were 20 refugee farmers participating in their program, this year there are 40 participants with a waiting list. They are currently looking for other land to expand their two-site program in New Hampshire.

Anthony Munene, Somali refugee and Farm Manager, thanked the NRCS for helping to fund this important demonstration project for refugee farmers. He also credited Ed Persons for donating the high tunnel and the labor to build it. He said, “we can’t wait to grow tomatoes, spinach, lettuce and bitter melon under the roof”.

Ellsmore told the farmers that this demonstration site is particularly important because “NH only grows 6% of its own food and we want to produce more. With your help, we will”.

At the seven-acre Dunbarton site, farmers start with 1/4 acre. If they are successful, they can increase their plot to one acre. They also use low cover crops and no pesticide spray. Plots often include mustard greens, lettuce, pumpkins, hot chili peppers, and Nepalese squash.